

Scope and Sequence and Course Design for an ESL Program

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Overseas, American-curriculum schools typically serve a small but culturally and linguistically diverse clientele. Using English as the principal language of instruction, students from many different languages and countries are expected to function competitively in mainstream classes as soon as possible. As a result, it is important that the English as a Second Language (ESL) program meet not only the basic interpersonal communicative needs of the students but their cognitive academic language needs as well. However, creating and implementing an ESL program that can meet these needs in as short a time as possible while remaining consistent with current knowledge and methods on second-language acquisition has proven to be no easy task. After nearly a year of brainstorming, reading, and consultations with our faculty, administration, and another international school in our region, we developed a program at Lincoln School, Kathmandu, Nepal, that is working.

Lincoln School is a private, overseas American-curriculum-based school. Two hundred fifty students from 36 different countries are enrolled in grades kindergarten through twelve (K-12). Approximately 80% of the students speak English as a second, third, or fourth language. Lincoln is the only international K-12 school in Nepal; it accepts students with little or no English proficiency up through 10th grade. However, because all subjects except foreign languages are taught in English, students must learn to function in this language both socially and academically as quickly as possible.

When we examined our department's program, we found it badly needed direction and continuity. It also needed to be integrated with the mainstream academic requirements the students faced. We felt an ESL scope and sequence would insure consistency and continuity as students moved from elementary to middle school or from middle school to high school, and as our faculty changed over the years. We wanted more flexibility so that a variety of students' needs could be accommodated. We also wanted better testing instruments to help establish entrance and exit criteria, and to assist in evaluating students' progress.

A Search for Resources

As we searched for viable possibilities, ESL teachers at the American Embassy School in New Delhi, India, recommended that we look at the IDEA Oral Proficiency Tests (IPT Tests) published by Ballart and Tinghe, Inc. The IPT Tests provide proficiency data plus diagnostic information on vocabulary, comprehension, syntax, and verbal expression that are normed for grades K-12 (IPT Tests I and II). The tests are correlated to the Chamot-Bloom scale of language acquisition and to Ballard and Tinghe's basic program, Carousel of Ideas, for grades K-8. We purchased both the IPT Tests and the Carousel of Ideas, intending them to be components of our

K-12 ESL program, which would also include evaluation of language background, and reading and writing proficiency.

As we examined the IDEA Language Profile Card, we could see clearly how vocabulary, comprehension, syntax, grammar, and verbal expression could be integrated through a progression of levels toward fluency in English. Many basic Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills (CALPS) were included, but we felt that the IDEA Program did not provide enough academic language experience to meet the needs of our students. Thus began our search for a way to integrate more academic language skills.

We consulted the content-area and classroom teachers, asking them to identify those academic language skills that ESL students need to be able to function in their classes. While each grade-level and core-content-subject teacher could identify vocabulary items, we all agreed that it would not be feasible for ESL teachers to cover all those items for mathematics, English, science, and social studies or history in any meaningful way. We agreed that if our ESL program attempted to support our students primarily by helping them with the actual core-content classroom work, i.e., homework and worksheets, our ESL program would probably lose direction or identity and become a tutoring program in support of classroom teachers.

A Program Evolves

As the classroom teachers and ESL teachers pondered the needs of our school and the ways to meet them, a program gradually began to evolve. We extended the concept of progressing developmental levels and different skill areas to include academic cognitive language skills for reading, writing, English, social studies, science, and study skills from grade one through grade twelve.

Integration of BICS and CALPS in Our Elementary School

At the elementary-school level, classroom teachers and the elementary ESL teacher identified key concepts and the cognitive skills along with related vocabulary that are basic for understanding throughout the elementary curricula. Our teachers decided that while it was helpful for ESL students to know certain core-content terms, it would be even more helpful for ESL students to learn the syntax and key terms for problem solving and critical thinking. No matter what the subject, our ESL (and any) student needs the language to communicate classification/categorization, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect relationships. What is needed is the language to make predictions and state conclusions (“if-then” and “therefore” statements). Consequently, we sought to identify vocabulary terms that would facilitate this kind of thinking and communication as well as terms that were “generic” to English, social studies, and science discussions.

Thus, while ESL students are learning the names of animals and adjectives to describe them, they learn to classify or compare and contrast the animals by appearance and habitats. Basic quantitative (all, some, none, a few, many) and comparative (more than, greater than, the most, the least, etc.) terms are introduced fairly early. Limited-English speakers learn how to use

belongs/does not belong, goes together/does not go together, same/similar/different, and/also/but/however, if/then/so/therefore. They learn to understand and give examples using the terms for example and for instance.

Instructional activities were designed to teach basic social studies/ geography terms that are relevant to all grades from third grade upward and were chosen because they are not specific to the study of a particular country or period of history. Students were asked to demonstrate understanding of the terms by identifying the landforms, by describing them, by drawing pictures, and by making a clay model. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency Skills were further developed by asking the students to classify, compare, and contrast the terms. (E.g., “A lake and a reservoir are both large bodies of water surrounded by land. However, a reservoir is formed by man making a dam across a river. A lake is formed by nature.”)

Integration of the ESL Scope and Sequence with the Academic Needs of Middle and High School

The process to determine key concepts, cognitive skills, and related vocabulary at the elementary-school level was repeated in the middle school and high school. ESL students at middle- and high-school levels are expected to have already learned many math and science concepts in their first languages. However, a lack of English vocabulary limits their ability to extend, express, or incorporate new information into their existing knowledge. Our core-content teachers decided to formulate a list of minimal requirements that ESL students needed to pass their courses. Reading-comprehension skills were identified that facilitate not only learning new vocabulary but encourage critical thinking as well. The middle-school/high-school ESL teacher then identified the functional terms that the students need to comprehend and express these concepts. Again, vocabulary and terms that help students to define and express relationships among ideas were emphasized.

In order to ease the sheer volume and complexity of reading material that these ESL students are faced with in content-area classes, History and English textbooks with reading levels approximately two years below grade level were ordered. These are used as the content material through which cognitive academic language skills are taught. The minimum content course requirements established by the content teachers are integrated with intensive exposure to new vocabulary in context and with functional language skills (e.g., expressing an opinion, stating and justifying an inference, expressing cause and effect).

Summary

The scope and sequence for teaching English as a second language as described in this article has facilitated our ability to meet the diverse and urgent needs for both basic interpersonal communicative language and cognitive academic language skills for our ESL students K-12. It is a framework that provides structure in an organized yet flexible manner. It respects current research on how second languages are acquired and is adaptable to a variety of instructional methods that research has shown to be effective. (We prefer Total Physical Response, The

Natural Approach, and Holistic Language methods.) It helps us clarify the ESL teacher's role in supporting core-content classroom instruction while maintaining the integrity and identity of the ESL program. It helps us provide continuity and direction as our students progress in English language proficiency. It also helps us establish criteria for evaluating students' progress and in identifying entrance and exit proficiencies. In sum, our scope and sequence has provided us with a clearer vision of how to coordinate and integrate BICS and CALPS in a multidisciplinary approach. Our scope and sequence helps us design lesson plans to achieve these objectives. As the scope and sequence is implemented we continue to evaluate its applicability to our needs, making adjustments/adaptations as appropriate. It has proven to be an efficient and reliable basis for guiding our work.

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